

about that. Senators, too. We have already voted, and I voted, to clarify our position that we are opposed to torture. I voted for the McCain position. But now, what we are arguing over, I am concerned. What are we going to do in terms of interrogation to get information that can save one marine's life or thousands of innocent people? Are we going to ask them: Please, pretty please? When they let on like some of the techniques that have been used are such horrible things—being threatened by a dog? Come on. Have they never delivered laundry to someone's house and had a dog come after them? Have they never lived? Now being threatened by a dog is considered what—torture? Oh, by the way, we can't have them in stressful positions. What is that? You mean like standing up? Some of these complaints are absolutely ludicrous. Are we going to be careful not to insult them in some way? How are we going to get this information?

And by the way, now our men and women who have to find a way to get information from these worst of the worst vicious killers in the world could be liable, and even worse than that, when they thought they were complying with the law as they understood it and as their superiors told them, they could be liable to be tried—after the fact.

This legislation at least says that prospectively, here is going to be what is expected. If you exceed this, if you get over into the torture area, yes, you will be liable. But to go back and say, now, wait a minute, what you did could make you liable, when we have people trying to do their job for the American people—our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan now could be sued, and there are complaints that we are not going to make sure these people are not going to be, after the fact, *ex post facto*, tried? These same people are talking about amnesty for people illegally in America. Yet when they talk about amnesty for people doing their job as best they could, as they understood the law, no, we do not want to give them amnesty. That would be a horrible mistake, if we do not provide some clarity and some protection for those who may have exceeded that clarity in the past even though they understood what they were doing was wrong.

Now we have this huge discussion about habeas corpus. Bring on the lawyers. What a wonderful thing we can do to come up with words like this. Our forefathers were thinking about citizens, Americans. They were not conceiving of these terrorists who are killing these innocent men, women, and children. These are not citizens. These are not people in America. We want them turned loose arbitrarily and then on the other hand turn around and, say, criticize the administration because some people who were caught in this process were subsequently released when you find out maybe they shouldn't have been?

Ladies and gentlemen, this is the political season, I am sorry to say. I would have thought the Senate could rise above all this partisan political stuff. Everybody is trying to rewrite history or rewrite the law or prove a mistake was made or this intelligence was available which was different from that intelligence. Who is taking the time and looking at where we are now? Where do we want to be? How are we going to handle interrogations? How are we going to handle evidence? How are we going to do a better job for our men and women in the decisions we make in Iraq and Afghanistan? Who is looking for the future around here? No, we are all throwing political spears at each other. I don't think the American people appreciate that. It is embarrassing, quite frankly, to me.

I have been on the Intelligence Committee for 4 years, and for 4 years we have been going back trying to refigure the intelligence. We have found out the intelligence we were receiving in that committee—the Senators, Congressmen, and the President—was not as good as it should have been. Okay, good. Admit that. Now what are we going to do about it? How many hearings do we have where the CIA and the Director of National Intelligence were asked: What are you doing to implement the law we put in place to address the problems we found? Where are we going to be in the future? What have we done to actually go to meet with our CIA agents around the world and hear what the real country situation is in critical parts of the world? Not one time have we done that.

No, even the Intelligence Committee, which for years the Senate worked to make sure it stayed nonpartisan, bipartisan, and worked together for the good of the country, in close quarters, now is just another partisan committee. Staff fight each other; intelligence information is leaked; classified intelligence information is leaked to the New York Times and the Washington Post. No one is identified. No one is punished for that.

What worries me, this is not just about politics; this is about people's lives. People get killed based on the intelligence we get or don't get or the oversight we have.

I hope we can complete our work. Hopefully, it will be good work by the end of the week.

Let's go home and get this political period over with, but when we come back next year, I think it is time we assess where we are. How are we going to do a better job? What is America's agenda? What can we do together in a bipartisan way? Is there anything left? And if we do not, I think there will be a pox on all of our houses.

So on this particular subject of the Military Commissions Act of 2006, let's get it up, let's debate it, and let's have a vote. We have to do it. I think they have done pretty good work. If I could get in a room with my lawyers, yes, I would write it differently. I think more

of that evidence should be admissible with less restraints. I think more of the techniques that have been used in the interrogation of terrorists should be used than are in this provision. Once again, it is not perfect, but it is good enough. It is the right thing to do.

Madam President, observing no Senator wishing to speak at this time, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Ms. MURKOWSKI). The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, I ask unanimous consent to be allowed to speak as in morning business.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DEMANDING ACCOUNTABILITY

Mrs. MURRAY. Madam President, the hardest decisions we make in the Senate involve asking our fellow Americans to risk their health and their lives in defense of our country. The cost to our country, to our communities, and to our families is so great that in any war we have an obligation to make sure we are doing right by our service members, by our veterans, and by our country.

That is why we in this Congress need to ask questions. We need to ask questions such as: Do our troops have a clear mission? Is there a plan to achieve that mission? Do our troops have the support and equipment they need to succeed? Do we have the right people in place? And are we taking care of our veterans when they return home from military service?

For too long, this Congress has not done its job of asking those questions and demanding answers. Here in Congress, we have a responsibility. We have a responsibility to make sure the Bush administration, or any administration, is fulfilling those critical requirements. So today I rise to offer an update on where we stand on some of these questions and to share some disturbing news from recent reports. The evidence I am going to share with my colleagues today points to five disappointing conclusions, and they all demand hearings and they demand accountability.

First of all, the Bush administration misled Congress about its failures in planning for the care of America's veterans.

Secondly, the Bush administration still does not have a plan to care for our veterans.

Third, we do not have a clear mission in the war in Iraq. And that fight has greatly impacted our ability to prosecute the broader war on terror and, according to the latest intelligence estimate, has helped to fuel new terrorist recruits.

Fourth, the Bush administration has put politics over progress in Iraq and at home. In Iraq, it sent political cronies to staff the provisional government instead of experienced professionals who could get the job done. From “Brownie” at FEMA to new reports about the HUD Secretary, the Bush administration put politics over competence.

Finally, Congress—us—we are not doing our job of oversight. Unless we hold hearings, until we demand answers, and until we require accountability, we will just keep muddling through with the same poor results.

We can do a lot better. We can be safer. And we can be more successful. But it has to start with an honest assessment of what is working, what is not, and what we need to change.

In that spirit, I want to discuss those five conclusions I mentioned, starting with the fact that the Bush administration misled Congress about its inadequate efforts to care for our veterans.

Over the past 2 budget years, the Bush administration was dramatically wrong in its planning for veterans health care. The result was a \$3 billion shortfall last summer. And this was not just a failure in planning. It meant failing to get our veterans the services they required in a timely fashion. It meant veterans had to face long waits to see a doctor. And it meant they did not get the care they deserved.

That horrible planning is no way to care for the veterans who have sacrificed so much for us. We can do better. That is why after that failure I joined with Senators AKAKA, DURBIN, and SALAZAR. Together we asked the Government Accountability Office to investigate what happened at the VA. Well, this is the report we got back. Frankly, the answers are pretty damning, and they cast doubt on whether we can rely on this VA for accurate numbers and straight answers.

I wish to focus on the four findings in this report.

First of all, the GAO found that the VA knew it had serious problems with its budget, but they failed to notify Congress, all of us here. Even worse, they misled us. The report suggests that the VA could still, today, be sending us inaccurate information in its quarterly reports.

Secondly, the GAO found that the VA was basing its budgets on “unrealistic assumptions, errors in estimation, and insufficient data.”

Third, the Pentagon failed to give the VA up-to-date information about how many service members would be coming down the pipeline and into the VA.

Finally, the GAO found that the VA did not adequately plan for the impact of service members coming home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

For me, I think one of the most disturbing findings is that the VA kept assuring us here in Congress that everything was fine, while inside the VA—at the same time it was assuring

us things were fine—it was very clear that the shortfalls were growing. The VA, in fact, became aware it would have a problem. In October of 2004, inside the VA, they knew they had problems, but they did not admit those problems until June of 2005. Veterans were telling me of long lines and delays in care. For months, I tried to give the VA more money, but the administration fought me every step of the way. And who paid the price for those deceptions? America’s veterans, and that was just wrong.

Let me walk through some of the deceptions found in this GAO report. It shows a very troubling gap between what the VA knew and what the VA told us.

According to the GAO report, starting back in October 2004, the VA knew that money was tight. It anticipated serious budget challenges, and it created, inside the VA, a “Budget Challenges” working group.

Two months later, in December of 2004, that budget group made internal recommendations inside the VA to deal with the shortfall they knew they had. They suggested delaying new initiatives and shifting around funding.

Two months later, in February of 2005, the Bush administration released its budget proposal for 2006. The GAO found that budget was based on “unrealistic assumptions, errors in estimation, and insufficient data.”

A week later, at a hearing on February 15, here, I asked the VA Secretary if the President’s budget was sufficient. He told me:

I have many of the same concerns, and I end up being satisfied that we can get the job done with this budget.

Let’s remember what was happening back at that time. I was hearing from veterans that they were facing delays in care and that the VA system was stretched to capacity. But the VA kept saying: Everything is fine.

On March 8, Secretary Nicholson told a House committee that the President’s fiscal year 2006 budget “gives VA what it needs.” Well, I was hearing a much different story as I spoke with veterans in my home State and around the country. So that is why on March 10 I offered an amendment in the Senate Budget Committee to increase veterans funding by 3 percent so we could hire more doctors and provide faster care for our veterans. Unfortunately, the Republican majority said no.

Now, that same month, while that was happening, the VA’s internal monthly reports showed that demand for health care was exceeding projections. That was another warning sign that the VA should have shared with us, but it did not.

On March 16, Senator AKAKA and I offered an amendment here on the Senate floor to increase veterans funding by \$2.85 billion. Once again, the Republican majority said no.

The next month, on April 5, Secretary Nicholson wrote to Senator HUTCHISON:

I can assure you that the VA does not need emergency supplemental funds in FY 2005.

A week later, on April 12, I offered two amendments on the Senate floor to boost veterans funding. First, I asked the Senate to agree that the lack of veterans funding was an emergency and we had to fix it. The Republican majority said no. So I asked the Senate to agree that supporting our veterans ought to be a priority. Again, the Republican majority said no. As a result, veterans did not get the funding they needed and the deception continued.

On June 9, I asked Secretary Nicholson at a hearing if he had enough funding to deal with the mental health challenges of veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan. He assured me the VA was fine.

So for 6 months, we had happy talk that everything was fine within the VA. Then, in June, just 2 weeks after the Secretary’s latest assurance, the truth finally came out.

On June 23, the VA revealed a massive shortfall of \$3 billion. Well, I went to work with my colleagues and we came up with the funding. But we could have solved that problem much earlier and saved our veterans the delays they were experiencing.

By misleading us the entire time, the Bush administration hurt our American veterans. We could have provided the money when it was needed. We could have been hiring the doctors and nurses we needed. We could have been buying the medical equipment that was needed. And we could have been helping thousands of veterans who were sitting on waiting lists waiting for care.

Here is the bottom line. The Bush administration knew about this problem in October of 2004. They saw it getting worse month by month, but here in the Senate, in the House, they assured us everything was fine. They worked adamantly to defeat my amendments to provide funding, and they did not come clean until June of 2005.

That is unacceptable. I think our veterans deserve real answers.

This GAO report shows that the VA was not telling us in Congress the truth and was fighting those of us who were trying to help. I think we need to bring Secretary Nicholson before the Veterans Affairs’ Committee so we can get real answers. We need to ensure that the VA doesn’t repeat the same mistake of the past 2 years. We owe that to our current and future veterans who sacrifice so much for us.

We need an explanation of why the VA lied to us about the so-called “management efficiency.” The GAO found those alleged savings were nothing but “hot air.” This report clearly shows the Bush administration misrepresented the truth to us in Congress for 4 fiscal years, through 4 budgets, and 4 appropriations cycles about those bogus savings. When they could not make these efficiencies a reality, they took the funds from veterans’ health care. That, too, is unacceptable.

This report also suggests that even in its latest quarterly reports to us, the

VA is slow to report and doesn't provide key information we required, such as the time required for veterans to get their first appointment.

The GAO report also says that the Department of Defense failed to provide the VA up-to-date information on how many service members would be separating from service and seeking care at the VA.

That is frustrating to me because I have been asking every general who comes up here if they are doing enough to ensure a smooth transition from the Pentagon to the VA. In fact, on February 16 of last year, I questioned Secretary Rumsfeld directly. I got him to agree that caring for our veterans is part of the cost of a war. But he had no real answer when I asked why his request for the war did not include funding to care for our veterans.

Finally, the GAO report verifies that the VA failed to plan for the impact of the veterans who are coming back from Iraq and Afghanistan. I am very concerned that the Bush administration still, today, right now, does not have a plan to meet the needs of our returning service members.

Look at the gap between what the VA told us it needs and what we are actually spending on veterans' health care. In July, a few months ago, the VA sent an estimate to the Congressional Budget Office. The VA said it would need \$1 billion a year for 10 years to care for veterans from Iraq.

But here is the problem. We are already spending more than \$1 billion this year, and we still have not seen the lion's share of veterans return home. There will be more veterans needing help, and \$1 billion a year is not going to cut it.

I have heard some of my colleagues speak about the generous increases to VA programs, and I agree they have been helpful. But unless the dollars we provide meet the needs of our veterans, we will not have fulfilled our responsibility to those we have asked to go to war for us.

Let's focus on one area of veterans health care—support for mental health challenges, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. Here is what the Associated Press said recently:

More than one-third of Iraq and Afghanistan veterans seeking medical treatment from the Veterans Health Administration report symptoms of stress or other mental disorders—a tenfold increase in the last 18 months, according to an agency study.

That is from the Associated Press. It is a good thing that veterans are coming home and seeking help. I hope it means we have made it easier to get care and we have reduced the stigma associated with the invisible impacts of war. During the Vietnam war, I saw those challenges firsthand when I volunteered in the psychiatric ward of the Seattle VA hospital.

I think it is good that our veterans are coming home and asking for care, but we have to make sure it is our responsibility in this Congress that we have the funding to meet that need.

The AP article I mentioned talks about a soldier from Virginia Beach, VA, who was having a hard time sleeping when he came home from Iraq. Do you know what he was told? He was told he would have to wait 2½ months for an appointment at the VA facility.

Here is a service member who has gone to war in Iraq, done what his country asked, and he comes home and asks for help, and all he is told by the VA is to get in line and wait 75 days. I find that pretty disgraceful.

I have held a number of discussions in my home State of Washington with our veterans and with mental health experts. I was recently in Everett, WA, on August 17. I heard about the challenges they are facing on the ground.

Whether it is dealing with a large number of veterans with severe physical injuries, or traumatic brain injuries, the VA has no plan to deal with this.

Whether it is dealing with the 16 percent of wounded service members coming back from Iraq with eye injuries, which Walter Reed reported in August, the VA has no plan to deal with this.

Whether it is dealing with one-third of all service members to return home and separate from the military, who are seeking mental health services, the VA has no plan. And we in Congress are still not getting straight answers.

In that AP article, a VA official said he is not aware of problems with veterans getting mental health services. Dr. Michael Kussman is quoted as saying:

We're not aware that people are having trouble getting services from us in any consistent way or pattern around the country.

A lot of our veterans advocates disagree with that. In fact, another VA official pointed to serious problems in meeting the mental health need of our veterans.

In the May edition of the *Psychiatric News*, Dr. Frances Murphy, the Under Secretary of Health Policy Coordination at the VA, said the agency is ill-prepared to serve the mental health needs of our Nation's veterans.

In that article, Dr. Murphy notes that some VA clinics don't provide mental health or substance abuse care, or if they do, "waiting lists render that care virtually inaccessible."

The Bush administration has failed to deliver our veterans the care they need, denying them the respect they deserve. Given the VA's bad track record and misleading statements, we need to demand in Congress a real plan from the VA to ensure that our veterans get the care they have earned.

Another question we need to be asking in the Senate is about our mission in Iraq today. Unless we have clarity and purpose of mission, we are not going to know when we have achieved it and when our troops can come home.

We all want the same thing in Iraq—for our troops to complete their mission successfully and come home safely. But today our troops' mission in Iraq lacks clarity. What are they ac-

complishing there today? Overthrowing Saddam Hussein? They already accomplished that. Looking for weapons of mass destruction? They looked; no weapons were found. Are they supposed to be setting up an Iraqi government? We have done that. The Iraqi people have created a constitution, elected leaders, and filled their Cabinet.

Our troops have done everything we have asked them to do. What is left? Will the President's policies get us there? That is the discussion we ought to be having in the Congress. But every time we ask these questions, we get the same empty response from the President, his Cabinet, and the Congress: Stay the course.

Stay the course is not a good plan, if the course you are on is not working. We also have to get to the truth about the relationship between Iraq and the broader war on terror.

On September 6, on the floor of the Senate, I warned that the President's focus on Iraq has distracted us from the larger war on terror. I said the President took a detour from the war on terror and invested the majority of our resources into Iraq—seemingly forever.

That weakens our ability to fight the broader war on terror and it leaves us vulnerable. We have not made the investments here at home to protect ourselves, and we have not finished our work against al-Qaida. Bin Laden is still on the loose. Afghanistan is a mess, and United States troops are imperiled.

Today, 3 weeks after I gave that speech on the Senate floor, we learned that the National Intelligence Estimate concluded that the war in Iraq helped to fuel the recruitment of new terrorists. The administration's failure to plan and face the truth in Iraq demands congressional hearings so we can chart a better course.

We also need to examine how the Bush administration bungled Iraqi reconstruction. On September 17, the *Washington Post* ran a story titled "Ties to GOP Trumped Know-How Among Staff Sent to Rebuild Iraq." That article describes how Americans were selected to work in Iraq for the Coalition Provisional Authority. That article said:

Applicants didn't need to be experts in the Middle East or in post-conflict reconstruction. What seemed most important was loyalty to the Bush administration.

It goes on to say:

The decision to send the loyal and the willing, instead of the best and the brightest, is now regarded by many people involved in the 3 and a half year effort to stabilize and rebuild Iraq as one of the Bush administration's gravest errors.

Many of those selected because of their political fidelity spent their time trying to impose a conservative agenda on the postwar occupation, which sidetracked more important reconstruction efforts and squandered good will among the Iraqi people, according to many people who participated in the reconstruction effort.

They had a political loyalty test instead of a competence test, and that

may be responsible for how long we have had to stay in Iraq and the problems we now face. Congress—us—we need to look at that and we need to hold people accountable.

Unfortunately, this pattern and practice of political favoritism within the administration extends beyond Iraq to how the Bush administration handles Government contracts here at home. Just last week, we got new evidence that a member of the President's Cabinet has made a series of statements that highlighted the importance of politics in awarding Government contracts in his agency.

In May, I asked the Inspector General at HUD to look into Secretary Alphonso Jackson's public statements that he deliberately denied a contract to a firm that had been critical of President Bush. Now, last week, the IG sent me the results of that investigation. This report is 340 pages long, with hundreds of pages of sworn testimony from dozens of HUD officials. This report includes sworn statements from HUD personnel, stating that Secretary Jackson told his staff to monitor the political affiliation of contract competitors and consider those affiliations in the awarding of contracts.

Secretary Jackson said that a HUD contractor had strong political affiliations that were not supportive of the President, and the Secretary said he did not want the contractor to receive any additional HUD contracts. As a result, the contractor's award was subjected to an unusual extent of delay and review.

So we have a Cabinet Secretary telling his staff to issue contracts based on politics, not based on who can do the best job for us, the American taxpayers. It is true that, in looking at the record, the Justice Department concluded:

that no apparent criminal violation could be discerned based on evidence to date.

But the Justice Department came to that conclusion only because HUD staff actually ignored the Secretary's inappropriate instructions.

When you combine what has been going on at HUD with what happened at the CPA in Iraq and reports about similar issues at the Department of the Interior, it is clear that this Congress—all of us—needs to demand accountability.

That is why, last week, I wrote to White House Chief of Staff Josh Bolten and urged him to take immediate steps to ensure that political favoritism and discrimination do not play a role in Federal contracts.

I recognize we cannot rely on the White House Chief of Staff to clean up the Bush administration, which brings me to my final point this morning.

We need real oversight. In this Congress, there has been very little oversight of this administration. The President has basically had free reign because of this Republican-controlled Congress, and we have failed to do the job in asking tough questions and demanding answers.

Norman Ornstein is an expert on Congress at the conservative American Enterprise Institute, and he said this Congress is the worst he has seen in terms of oversight.

He told the Philadelphia Inquirer:

These people have long thought of themselves as foot soldiers in the President's army, and their view is that oversight is something to avoid, lest they find something that might embarrass the administration. I don't see a single sign that this attitude will substantially change.

That was congressional expert Norman Ornstein on the Republican failure to oversee the Bush administration.

Democrats are trying to provide the oversight that Republicans so far have been unwilling to provide. On Monday, in fact, the Democratic Policy Committee held a hearing on preparations for the war in Iraq. Retired military leaders at that hearing told us that the Bush administration failed to plan for the war and that the administration misled the American people.

We had to hold those hearings under a policy committee banner because Republicans would not hold real committee oversight hearings. We have to have oversight here, no matter what the administration is, Republican or Democratic, so that we as Members of this body who represent people across the country can learn the facts and we can fix things that are not going well. That is our job. If we never have real hearings, if we never demand real accountability, well, we will never get good results.

I believe America can do a lot better. I believe we can be more secure. I believe our troops can be safer. But it has to start with the truth, not rosy predictions of how things will be, not declarations of will that gloss over the facts on the ground, not corruption in politics holding back progress. Simply the truth. And, so far, this Congress has been unwilling to let our citizens learn the truth.

I think the American people deserve better, and I hope each one of us goes home and thinks about what our responsibility is to the people we represent and to the future of this country.

Madam President, I yield the floor and suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The assistant legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER (Mr. THUNE). Without objection, it is so ordered.

ORDER OF PROCEDURE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, for the information of our colleagues, we will engage in a unanimous consent request which will set out the activity for the afternoon and possibly early evening on the Supreme Court Hamdan decision.

I ask unanimous consent that the cloture motion with respect to amendment No. 5036 be withdrawn, and that further, the cloture vote scheduled in relation to H.R. 6061 be delayed to occur following the disposition of S. 3930, and that the Senate now proceed to the consideration of Calendar No. 634, S. 3930, relating to military tribunals; provided further, that the substitute amendment, the text of which is at the desk, be considered and agreed to as original text for the purpose of further amendment; provided further, that the only other amendments in order, other than any managers' amendments which are to be cleared by both managers and the two leaders, be the following:

Levin, substitute; Rockefeller, congressional oversight; Kennedy, interrogation; Byrd, sunset; Specter, habeas.

I further ask unanimous consent that the listed amendments be limited to 60 minutes equally divided between the two leaders or their designees, other than the Specter amendment and the Levin amendment which will be limited to 2 hours equally divided, as stated above, and that there be 3 hours for general debate equally divided, again, between the two leaders or their designees. I further ask unanimous consent that following the disposition of the above amendments and the use or yielding back of time, the bill be read a third time and the Senate proceed to a vote on passage, with no intervening action or debate.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Mr. REID. Reserving the right to object, Mr. President, this is in keeping with our agreement. I wanted the record to reflect—in case Senator LEAHY is watching us because he wanted to make sure he would have 45 minutes on his amendments and 15 minutes on the bill—it is my understanding Senator SPECTER will be giving him 15 minutes of his time, but if he doesn't, I will take it from the bill. So Senator LEAHY will have his 45 minutes, 15 minutes on this bill.

So I think this is an opportunity to improve this bill. We would all like to have had more time for hearings and debate on the floor, but we are where we are. I am thankful and grateful that we have an opportunity to improve this bill.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Is there objection?

Without objection, it is so ordered.

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, I will have an opening statement on the bill. But what we have done is set out, with a time agreement, a way to address a very important piece of legislation. I appreciate the Democratic leader and his caucus, our leadership and our caucus all agreeing upon this outline of how we will address an issue that will make us safer and more secure.

We will turn to the bill, and then I will make an opening statement, and then we will start right in with the amendment process following my opening remarks.